

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 818

By McLeary

A RESOLUTION to designate September as "Dropout Prevention Awareness Month" in Tennessee.

WHEREAS, the school dropout rate in the United States has been labeled a "silent epidemic," wherein nationally almost one third of all public high school students – and nearly one half of all black, Hispanic and Native Americans – fail to graduate from public high school with their classes; and

WHEREAS, although achievement levels are increasing, only 72 out of 100 Tennessee ninth grade students graduate within four years; the Southern Regional Education Board reports that Tennessee has experienced a 13% graduation rate decrease between 1992 and 2002, according to federal data compiled by the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research; and

WHEREAS, although Tennessee's cohort dropout rate (those students who dropout over a four year period) has fallen from 10.7% in 2004 to 10.4% in 2005, and our event dropout rate (those who dropout that year) stands at 2.6%, the Department of Education reported that 8,028 students dropped out of school during the 2004-2005 school year; and

WHEREAS, the U.S. Department of Education reports that recent statistics put the daily rate of dropouts in high school throughout this country at approximately 5,000 students a day; excessively high dropout rates threaten the nation's productivity, lessen our state's ability to compete successfully in the global economy, and represent a tragic waste of young lives; and

WHEREAS, reports nationwide have found that the school dropout rate is inextricably related to the high rate of illiteracy and that, like other at-risk students, the dropout is vulnerable to numerous social conditions, including poor academic achievement, chronic unemployment, substance abuse, teenage pregnancy, suicide, poor self-esteem, and criminal and other antisocial behaviors; and

WHEREAS, the earnings of and taxes paid by the school dropout will be substantially less during his lifetime than that of the high school graduate, and the school dropout is more likely to need public assistance and subsidized housing and health care; and

WHEREAS, the Alliance for Excellent Education conducted a study in 2003, which stated that only 40% of adults who dropped out of high school were employed at that time, compared to 60% of adults who completed high school and 80% for those with a bachelor's degree; and

WHEREAS, U.S. Department of Labor employment projections indicate that jobs requiring only a high school degree will grow by just 9% by the year 2008, while those requiring a bachelor's degree will grow by 25%; and

WHEREAS, with the creation of the Tennessee HOPE Scholarship Program, every Tennessee student has the opportunity to obtain a college education by making the necessary grades to receive financial assistance to pay for their tuition and fees; and

WHEREAS, the National Dropout Prevention Center provides statistics that show 75% of America's state prison inmates are high school dropouts, and 59% of America's federal prison inmates did not complete high school; they estimate that a 1% increase in high school graduation rates would save approximately \$1.4 billion in incarcerations costs; and

WHEREAS, although a disproportionate number of poor, urban, black youth drop out of school, national data on school dropouts indicate that the problem crosses all socioeconomic levels; the National Center for Education Statistics reported in 2002 that students from low-income families have a dropout rate of 10%, students from middle income families have a dropout rate of 5.2%, and 1.6% of students from high-income families dropout; and

WHEREAS, school dropout takes a toll on the next generation as well as the present generation, perpetuating a cycle of illiteracy and economic dependency for years to come in many families; and

WHEREAS, school dropout is a multifaceted problem for which there are no quick and easy solutions, and addressing the social and economic impact of the problem requires an innovative, multidisciplinary approach; and

WHEREAS, reducing the number of students who drop out of school each year requires the determined and consistent participation of families, students, schools, business and industry, the community, and all levels of government, working in partnership to heighten the public's awareness of the dire consequences of dropping out of school on the individual and society; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE ONE HUNDRED FOURTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING, that the month of September is hereby designated as "School Dropout Prevention Awareness Month" in Tennessee.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the General Assembly encourages Tennesseans to observe the month with appropriate programs and activities to heighten public awareness of the need to address the causes and consequences of school dropout, reduce the school dropout rate in Tennessee, and encourage students to remain in school until graduation, and of the benefits of a high school education.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a copy of this resolution shall be transmitted to the Department of Education, the State Board of Education, the Tennessee School Board Association, the Tennessee Organization of School Superintendents, the Tennessee Education Association, the Tennessee Parent and Teachers Association, and the Tennessee Business Roundtable.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.